

**Rhode Island Department of Education
and the
Burrillville School Department**

Face-to-Face Meeting Report and Agreement

April 1, 2002

Overview

A "Face-to-Face" meeting between the Burrillville school district and the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) occurred on April 1, 2002. The meeting was scheduled as a result of RIDE identifying Burrillville High School as "low performing," based upon four years of student assessment data. The "Face-to-Face" meeting is the first step in the ongoing process of accountability for school improvement entitled Progressive Support and Intervention. It is designed to allow the school district to address its capacity to engage in the four core processes of school improvement: self-study, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The meeting report is a public recitation of the steps to be taken in the district to increase student achievement in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics over the ensuing year.

School: Burrillville High School

Attending from Burrillville: Dr. Barbara Von Villas, Superintendent; Dr. Marlyce Adams, Assistant Superintendent; Richard Trogisch, Principal; Lois Short, Assistant Principal; David Sheehan, Burrillville High School teacher and union representative; Linda Klegraeffe, Parent, School Improvement Team member; Alan Chuman, School Committee member; and Julian MacDonnell, Pupil Personnel Director.

RIDE Staff: David V. Abbott, Esq., Interim Assistant Commissioner; Rick Richards, Commissioner Support; Paul Williams, Office of Research, High School Reform, and Adult Education; Dr. Susan Wood, Coordinator School Support System, Office of Special Needs; Jackie Bournam, Office of Research, High School Reform and Adult Education; and Andrea Castaneda, Research Developer/SALT Training Assistant, Office of School Improvement and Accountability.

RIDE Welcome and Meeting Orientation

Interim Assistant Commissioner David V. Abbott welcomed the group and gave an overview of the process and objectives of the meeting. Each meeting follows a similar format. The school district is asked to begin with a presentation on the status of school and district efforts to improve student achievement in ELA and mathematics. RIDE staff then responds to the school district's presentation, and adds comments based upon data analysis performed prior to the meeting. District and school officials next describe future plans to add or modify action plans to improve teaching and learning, and to identify existing or prospective barriers to implementation. The meeting is designed to conclude with shared expectations of the respective roles of the school, school district, and RIDE in supporting ongoing school improvement efforts. Assistant Commissioner Abbott concluded by noting that the meeting would result in a report to be made public at an upcoming meeting of the Burrillville School Committee.

School District Presentation

Representatives from Burrillville were given the opportunity to respond to the school performance category designation as it applies to their district. The Superintendent, Dr. Barbara Von Villas, stated that there has been relatively little reaction in the community to the school rankings. She discussed the tremendous turnover in ELA staff and the impact that it had on students and staff. Dr. Von Villas spoke of the great commitment on the part of the high school teachers and administrators to have students achieve at their highest levels. Her opinion was that testing results have been diffused by the disruption caused by recent school renovations and the degree of staff turnover. While the high school showed improvement in mathematics, ELA scores have actually declined in some areas. The Superintendent attributes this to an unusually high degree of turnover of ELA faculty, to the point of having uncertified teachers during the testing period. She believes that the school is now making progress both in terms of teacher stability and consistency of instruction in the area of English language arts. However, she also emphasized the need for increased opportunities for student writing across disciplines.

Burrillville High School Principal, Richard Trogisch, spoke about the difficulty in changing a school culture. It involves getting students to focus on the test and having them understand how the test reflects on the community. It also involves a shift in teacher emphasis – to ask “why” instead of “what.” Mr. Trogisch spoke at length about how the math department has prepared students to do their best and are working to get students to achieve. He then added that the high school is promoting block scheduling and academics as well as more interdepartmental work and performance task assessment. They are also expanding their ability to assess student performance through a variety of methods, not just paper and pencil assessments.

The Assistant Principal, Lois Short, commented on the math initiative. With its greater stability, the math department was able to start moving ahead on standards based instruction. Five of the nine mathematics teachers are piloting an integrated, conceptually-based mathematics program. Both the math and ELA departments have submitted their analyses of areas of deficit to the high school administration. This information will be used to modify instructional practices through targeted professional development. David Sheehan, a Burrillville High School teacher and Union President, concurred and spoke about how teachers were focused on interdepartmental collaboration, as well as improving student outcomes.

The Superintendent spoke about an upcoming professional development opportunity, which will take place this summer. For each curriculum area (K-12), they will have a group of teachers come together and look at the curriculum. Burrillville wants to ensure that math standards are integrated into the curriculum. According to Dr. Von Villas, a curriculum that has performance-based standards and NTCM is a solid curriculum. Forty teachers will be trained to do vertical alignment over the summer.

Burrillville wants to afford all students the opportunity to be challenged and the opportunity to participate in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The focus will be to challenge students to think and to be good problem solvers. Dr. Von Villas spoke of changes in types of instruction that necessitates students utilizing higher order thinking. It is getting at the “why” question which is a shift in thinking.

There was additional discussion on the action plan for ELA and who is going to focus on what. This has not been plotted out yet. Dr. Von Villas and Mr. Trogisch each addressed the recent NEASC self-assessment and site visit. They believe that the NEASC report will tell them exactly where they need to go in terms of action planning for ELA and overall school improvement. The school is reviewing a draft NEASC report over the April vacation. The official report will not be issued until July. Assistant Commissioner Abbott commended the use of the NEASC report to inform ongoing school improvement planning.

The Parent/School Improvement Team representative, Linda Klegraefe, discussed a student-mentoring program, which is slated for implementation for the next school year. The school newsletter is also an integral part of how the school takes the time to keep parents informed. She confirmed that school efforts to promote personalization (such as staying with one homeroom teacher for four years) were real, and that students do feel that they have someone who knows them and takes an interest in them.

Mr. Chuman, the Burrillville School Committee chair, spoke about how proud the community was of the school and that people feel like they are making real progress. The school board is supportive and appreciative of the district

administrative team and the teachers. The Superintendent holds the principals accountable. Improvement, according to Mr. Chuman, is about expectations of the system changing the culture and teaching people to think differently.

The Pupil Personnel Director, Julian MacDonnell, spoke about the ongoing initiative to promote inclusive educational practices. The high school is in the process of connecting with the middle school and examining its inclusive foundation, which is an integral part of the “All Kids” agenda. Mr. Trogisch commented on the need for increased communication and articulation of programming between the middle school and the high school.

RIDE Data Analysis – High School

The RIDE inter-disciplinary team made a series of observations based on its review of the district’s strategic plan, the high school’s school improvement plan, assessment data, district curricula, NEASC self-study information, SALT survey and visit report, School Support visit report, and Info works data.

- The school’s profile for 1998-2001 (over a three-year period) indicates that student performance is equally distributed (33.45% performing in the high category; 30.69% performing in the moderate category and 35.86% performing in the low category).
- This school’s average percentage of “no scores” over the past four years is 12% for the New Standards exams and 9% for the RI Writing Assessment.
- The targets for math concepts and math problem solving were met for both the high performing and low-performing students.
- The targets for the math skills sub-test were not met. Over a four-year period, students performing at the lowest levels increased from 32% to 43%, comparing the first two years with the second two years. High performing students decreased from 52.5% to 47.1%.
- In Reading, the Basic Understanding target in the high range was met. Students in the low-performing category increased from 21.7% to 26.4%.
- All targets were met in the Analysis and Interpretation sub-test.
- In Writing Effectiveness, the target was met for the highest performing students. While this category has displayed a steady increase over a three-year period, the target to decrease the percentage of low performing students has not been met.

- For the RI Writing Assessment, neither target was met. Over a four-year period, the high-performing category decreased from 39.6% to 35.8%. The low performing category remained unchanged at 25% of students.
- While Burrillville seems to have a grasp of what needs to be addressed to improve student achievement, there is not always a connection between that awareness and the strategic priorities set forth in action plans.
- Burrillville needs to address its lack of infrastructure to support school improvement efforts, and increase the focus of the school improvement plan and district strategic plan on increasing student achievement in ELA and mathematics.
- Paul Williams, who recently served on the NEASC site visit team, commented on the quality of the high school's technology program, the caring nature of the faculty, and the overall skill and ability of the administrative team.

RIDE/District Agreements

Dr. Von Villas and Assistant Commissioner Abbott identified the following immediate strategies to improve student achievement at Burrillville High School:

- Utilize the forthcoming NEASC report and recommendations to develop reform initiatives and improvement strategies;
- Develop a strategy to improve communication with the Burrillville community about the activities and initiatives of the school department;
- Continue the focus on expanding the integrated math curriculum;
- Develop an action plan for improving student outcomes in the area of ELA;
- Develop strategies to recruit quality teachers who are state certified in their respective content areas;
- Review the high school schedule for increased common planning time and block scheduling opportunities;
- Create opportunities to expand the collaboration between high school and middle school personnel;
- Create and support a local system of ongoing assessment, data collection and analysis to drive instructional reform efforts;

- Increase accountability for instructional practices and reform efforts; and
- Appoint an individual to be accountable at the district level for school-based improvement efforts as part of an increased focus on building an infrastructure to support ongoing systemic reform.

The Superintendent and Assistant Commissioner Abbott led a brief discussion at the end of the meeting regarding teacher contract language. It was suggested by Assistant Commissioner Abbott that Burrillville consider a joint meeting between district level representatives, union representatives and high school representatives to have collaborative dialogue on teacher contract language in terms of school improvement initiatives.